

# Nature Vancouver Summer Camp at Blowdown Creek

29 July - 5 August 2007

by Marian Coope, with contributions from Marion Boyle, Daryl Sturdy,  
Elly Brok, Chris Holmes, Donald Burton and Jane Srivastava

Blowdown Creek - or Blowdown Lake? Our camp was beside neither, but near both. Situated by a tributary of Blowdown Creek arising from a nameless lake (nameless, at least, on the federal 1:50,000 map) below which we pitched our tents, the camp was referred to indiscriminately by both names. It was set in the meadows beneath what is now known as Blowdown Lake, just under Blowdown Pass (also federally nameless). It all depends on what maps or guides you consult: the provincial 1:20,000 map does name these features.

If the naming of creek and lake at Blowdown was problematic, the naming of the mountains was worse. In camp, a general agreement on which mountain you've climbed, and which has been climbed by the other fellow is essential. On the National Topographic Survey map, only one name appears: Gott Peak. Dick Culbert's *A Climber's Guide to the Coastal Ranges of British Columbia* [1965] gives its [mythical] height as 9,700 ft. and says of it:

"This summit appears on several maps and would have represented the highest summit in the southern Coast Range had it existed. There is, however, no such peak although the name has been dropped on an 8,000 ft. summit which happened to be in the proper place."

Since 1965, names have proliferated on the surrounding peaks, but they are not always the same names, nor do peaks necessarily have only one name although most of them involve Gott, nor are their altitudes perfectly constant. Indeed,

In camp, we had so many Gotts,  
They tied us up in dreadful knots-  
We hardly knew which way to climb.  
But now we've got it down in rhyme,  
When next we go to Blowdown Lake,  
We'll know at once which route to take.

Read on, and eventually all will come clear.

This was not the first camp in the Blowdown Creek area. In 1978, according to John Philip (*Discovery* 7(4): 93-96), as an indirect result of the campaign to preserve the Stein River's watershed and declare it a provincial park, Nature Vancouver set up camp in the meadows in order to explore the potential park, for Blowdown Pass leads into the Stein watershed. During our week there, we did not feel drawn to the area in the same way - but a week is never long enough to do justice to all possible trips.



Looking west over Blowdown Lake  
towards the camp.

*Photo by Jane Srivastava*



Supper under the tarpaulins. The rain is letting up.

*Photo by Elly Brok*

Blowdown Pass is some 15 km off the Duffey Lake Road between Pemberton and Lillooet. A rough logging road allowed us to drive part way up to the helicopter staging area where we parked the cars. From there, an old mining road, navigable only by SUVs, led up to the pass at 2,170 m. (7,119 ft.) where the road is blocked – deliberately – by boulders. We had an agreeable two hours' walk up the road, traversing along the hillside before plunging down towards the creek and our campsite in the meadows. On either side of us rose mountains: to the north, Gott Peak, a long, smooth, peakless mountain, gently rising from the pass to 2,511 m (8,238 ft.), and to the southwest, the much more formidable-looking cliffs of Gotcha Peak, cliffs that, deceptively, turned out not to be the true peak at all.

But we were not disappointed. All the familiar ingredients of an alpine camp were there: the lush meadows filled with wildflowers that we greeted like old friends, the conifers, alone or in clumps that gave the meadows a park-like air, the fast-flowing stream into which some people occasionally plunged a careless boot, and the hidden streamlets under the greenest sward that invited others, all unwary, to set up tents right there. In the sunset, the Gotcha cliffs overlooking the camp glowed like molten gold.

The first two nights were cold at our 1,950 m (6,400 ft) camp. Marion Boyle reports on them as follows: "One of the joys of graduating to octogenarian status is that dentistry nowadays has enabled us to fill in our gaps. I now have two partial dentures, which, my dentist tells me, are best left out at night. So I bought a nice little plastic container in which they could rest overnight beside wash-up articles outside my tent. In the morning, I emerged from my tent and opened my neat denture container. My dentures were ice-bound! Hot tea released them from their bondage, and my freed artificials allowed me to enjoy our usual sumptuous breakfast." Thank you, Marion. That's a first for NV camps, I believe.



Elly Brok on Gott Peak. Looking southwest up the main valley of Blowdown creek.

*Photo courtesy of Elly Brok*

That Monday, many of us set off for Blowdown Pass. On the climb up from camp, after thrashing through an aggressive band of willow, we crossed wonderful fields of deepest blue lupines and a fantastic patch of columbine. At the pass, the wind was icy, but once on the slope up to Gott Peak, the chill disappeared, and the ascending party enjoyed spectacular views from the summit, including the sight of two other campers scrambling up the opposite side of the pass to Gotcha Peak. The scramblers later reported that the old snow patches they traversed were icy, which didn't deter many others from ascending them - and glissading down - in the warmer days that followed. Almost everyone ascended both peaks. After that, the hikes varied. Daryl Sturdy reported on the trip to the "Tempting Tarns":

"On Tuesday, a large group of us, led by Leo Eutsler, started strongly from the camp, contouring around the ridges behind the camp, but as we progressed, the trip turned into a real bushwhack. In the thick of it, Leo realized that not everyone was going to enjoy this. He gave us the option of going on or making a leisurely return to camp. Several people returned. Anne Leathem volunteered to lead whoever wanted to continue, and many did. After a time, we encountered some wide, boulder-laden slides that made for tricky going. Maps were consulted, compass readings taken and guidebooks perused. None gave us a very good indication of where we were or where we needed to go. A few more people decided to turn back. The rest of us kept going in the hope of finding the tarns around the next corner. And rounding the last one, we came upon a large meadow with sufficient trees to hide its full extent. Hope sprang in many breasts but all we encountered were some small pools, hardly worthy of the name "tarns." Disappointed, we ate our lunches and headed back to camp vowing to find those tarns another day.



Crossing a rock slide.

*Photo by Ian McAskill*

“On Wednesday, Leo led a group up Gotcha Peak, and from there I saw that a ridge extended quite a distance to the southwest, in the direction of the tarns. I hiked down to the first col (B) to check that the route was doable. Seeing that it was, although a bit of a scramble, I returned and offered to lead a trip along the ridge. There were two takers, Ian McAskill and Peter Cawsey. The three of us followed the ridge from col B between Gotcha and Gott II to col C, near Gott III. The views were amazing. We could look down on the Cottonwood Creek valley on one side and the Blowdown Creek Valley on the other, with views of the Kidney Lakes. Ahead of us stretched the ridge that rose to the top of Gott III, a tempting hike we never had time for. The most exciting view though, was that of the tarns, both the Southern Tarns and the ones higher up the flank of Gott III. We scrambled down from the ridge, picking our way through the rocks and snowfields to the closest tarn. It was a beautiful little lake, with a snowfield along one side. Not feeling up to retracing our steps, and wanting to see where we’d got to the previous day, we continued on. We found the tarns were on a bench, above our lunch spot of the previous day. When we hiked down to the lunch spot and looked back up, there was no way of telling that the tarns were there—it looked like a continuous slope up to the ridge. Hiking back to camp, we following the flags I’d put up on Tuesday. Back at camp, we were in time to catch Leo, Hugh, David and Ness at their happy hour. They welcomed us with a glass of wine.”



Don Griffiths and Laura Parkinson digging a biffy.

*Photo by Daryl Sturdy*

On later days, groups returned to the area via the lower route, but by way of the Kidney Lakes. Both Jane Srivastava and Elly Brok remembered the “lovely area we called the Japanese gardens.” It was beyond the “flat lunch rock” with its excellent view. Elly writes: “Moss everywhere and water running in and out of holes through the stones and greenery; beautiful flowers were growing there [marsh-marigolds and cinquefoils] that I had not noticed anywhere else. The Japanese gardens were a special area created by Mother Nature of whom I am always in awe.” Northern anemones were also to be found there, identified by John Coope. One of the groups crossed the formidable rockslides, but found themselves bushwhacking on a steep slope and running out of time, so they returned without reaching the tarns.

Back in camp, Elly recalls, “I took a day off hiking to do some photography all by myself. Nice and quiet. Listening to the animals and birds. Lying on the ground taking pictures, and looking through a photographer’s eyes, you see a lot more, enjoying the calm. On the ridge to the north just above Blowdown Pass, I found my favourite flower, the white western anemone. Now I have seen it in its three stages, from

just out of the ground, through flowering and into the seed stage. I was close to the ground just clicking away and I came up to get some breath when Phil Edgell did exactly the same. Two heads rising together. That was funny - neither of us knew the other was there. We sat under a bush comparing our pictures (now possible with these digital cameras) and shared some food.”

Chris Holmes records a hike with Margaret Ostrowski in a different direction: “The far-side meadows (as Bill Kinkaid called them) on the east side of Blowdown Pass, in the Stein Valley Provincial Park were, for me, a highlight of the camp. From the heights of Blowdown Pass and Gott Peak the meadows are an undifferentiated and seemingly uninteresting grey carpet of heather, slashed by the two old mining roads. But when Margaret and I hiked down in the meadows along the lower road we were amazed to find that the grey mass was in fact a beautiful and subtle combination of tiny white, blue and red flowers mingled in the grey heather. Turning south near the tree line and after crossing meadows, we discovered a pleasantly located campsite near the stream that drains into the south fork of Cottonwood Creek. Although we later visited the “Japanese gardens” past Kidney Lakes, I thought this stream with its meandering stepped waterfalls and stunted trees reminded me more of a Japanese garden than did the other one. Further down, the stream plunged over a steep incline, which we didn’t explore. We had lunch above a small tarn with a panoramic view of the Gotts, the meadows, the three summits and the Stein Valley. We returned the way we had come, and so ended a very gratifying hike.”

On Saturday afternoon, as usual, we took down the camp, whereupon the weather, mostly fine all week, turned awful. The big tent was packed up, but the kitchen tent, having been lifted over the kitchen fixtures and prepared for folding, was caught in torrential rain that lasted most of the rest of the afternoon. Tarpaulins were hastily set up over the coverless kitchen and tables—chairs had been packed—and we took shelter underneath. Elly best captured the spirit of the moment: “The most fun I had was on Saturday when it rained so much. I took pictures of all the getups I saw around and found the atmosphere so beautiful under that tarp. The wine was flowing and we were all huddled together and laughing our heads off.” It was amazing how cheerful we all were.

Indeed, it was a most cheerful camp. Don Burton, reflecting on the privilege of being able to enjoy these wilderness camps, and our responsibility to maintain the wilderness, writes: “It is interesting to think of our summer camps in terms of the footprint that we leave behind. Camp leader Hugh Hamilton made us sensitive to the ecological damage that we might be doing while we enjoyed ourselves, and did a great deal to minimize this damage and to ensure recovery of the terrain after our departure. Plastic or coconut mats along the most-used paths to the cook and dining tents prevented eradication of the plants growing under foot. Careful filling and covering of the biffy holes and slop pits on our departure would enable the surface to recover its natural state quickly (and prevent bears from digging them up). As we were leaving, Hugh and John Coope inspected the whole area to make sure we had left nothing behind. Apparently we did such a good job in 2006 at Monica Meadows in the Purcell Mountains that local people reported this year that our campsite was undistinguishable from the surrounding terrain. If 54 people can leave such a minimal footprint behind, perhaps we are justified in taking so many into the wilderness at one time.”

One important reason why we all enjoyed the camp was that we were again magnificently fed by last year’s team, Jane Taylor and Kathy Macdonald, with the help this year of Jane’s niece, Bethany Sandeman-Allen. And like last year, gales of laughter flowed frequently from the cook tent. Musically, we were entertained every evening before dinner by Mike Castle, perched on a stump and singing to the accompaniment of his banjo, and on Friday evening by a singsong organized and conducted by Daryl Sturdy and Lee Wright. Above all, the camp’s success was due to the excellent organization and attention to detail of the Camp Committee. Camp Chair Kitty Castle, Camp Manager Hugh Hamilton, Trip Organizer Bill Kinkaid, and the other members, Nigel Peck, Helen Gowans and Ian McAskill worked hard to make everything go smoothly. All of us campers are most grateful to them. Jane Srivastava says of them, “Going on Monday to unload the truck [at the VNHS locker in New Westminster] gave me an even greater appreciation for all the committee does. After all the planning and work during the week, most of the committee turned up again to finish the job.” Thank you again from every one of us.



Cheerful faces under the tarpaulin.  
Kathy Macdonald and Gurli Nielson

*Photo by Elly Brok*



A farewell to camp.  
*Photo by Elly Brok.*